



Massachusetts Water Resources Authority



City of Cambridge



City of Somerville

## Joint Press Release

### **Alewife Brook Combined Sewer Overflows To Be Addressed**

The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville are finalizing plans for a series of projects to significantly reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs) into the Alewife Brook. The planned projects build on work MWRA, Cambridge and Somerville completed over the last several years that already has reduced CSO discharges to the brook. Design of the remaining projects resumed last year after final certification was received from the state Environmental Policy Act office.

The water quality of Alewife Brook is often impaired due to bacteria and other pollutants from a number of sources, including CSOs, cross connections between sanitary sewers and stormwater runoff. During both wet and dry weather, the Brook generally fails to meet state bacteria standards for fishing and swimming. Contaminants originate in the watershed communities of Belmont, Arlington, Cambridge and Somerville, all of which are undertaking programs to identify and control the sources of pollution. Public health officials recommend avoiding contact with the Brook during rain storms and for 48 hours afterwards, as there may be increased health risks due to bacteria or other pollutants.

Portions of Cambridge and Somerville are served by combined stormwater and sanitary sewer systems common in older cities. There are eight CSO outfalls along Alewife Brook that release untreated discharges during moderate and heavy rainfall. These discharges relieve the sewer system, preventing sewage backups into homes, businesses and streets. Four additional outfalls were closed through CSO control efforts by MWRA and Somerville several years ago.

The planned projects are intended to minimize CSO flows to Alewife Brook, primarily by separating combined sewer systems in parts of Cambridge.

The first piece slated to move ahead is Cambridge's planned stormwater outfall and treatment wetland associated with sewer separation work in the neighborhood east of Fresh Pond Reservation. The City has submitted a Notice of Intent to the Cambridge Conservation Commission for work in or near wetland areas of the Alewife Reservation, and regulatory review is currently ongoing. The actual construction schedule will depend on the schedule for receiving the final wetlands permit.

The separation work will be done by the City of Cambridge with MWRA funds under a Memorandum of Understanding and Financial Assistance Agreement. Cambridge began construction of the sewer separation plan in July 1998, with MWRA funds. Four of the construction contracts have been completed and the work has already significantly reduced CSO

discharges to Alewife Brook: CSO discharges have been reduced from 63 times per year with 50 million gallons average annual discharge volume to 25 times per year with 33 million gallons average annual discharge volume. Full implementation of the recommended CSO control plan is expected to reduce the discharges to 7 times per year with an annual discharge volume of 7.4 million gallons.

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) are expected to make a final decision on the appropriate level of CSO control and water quality standards for the Alewife Brook after further studies and public review. The regulatory agencies' determination is currently scheduled to be issued in September 2007. MWRA's CSO program is also overseen by a federal judge as part of the Boston Harbor court case. MWRA, along with the CSO communities, is implementing 25 different CSO control projects along Boston Harbor, the Mystic, Charles and Neponset Rivers and Alewife Brook.

For more information on CSOs and the CSO abatement program, contact MWRA at 617-788-1170 or visit their website at [www.mwra.state.ma.us](http://www.mwra.state.ma.us) or visit the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville websites at [www.cambridgema.gov/~TheWorks](http://www.cambridgema.gov/~TheWorks) and [www.ci.somerville.ma.us](http://www.ci.somerville.ma.us).

Updated information on water quality in the Alewife Brook watershed can be found at the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) website, [www.mysticriver.org](http://www.mysticriver.org) and at a "real time" site co-sponsored by the City of Somerville and MyRWA at [www.mysticriveronline.org](http://www.mysticriveronline.org).

Available on-line at: [www.mwra.com](http://www.mwra.com) and [www.cambridgema.gov/~TheWorks](http://www.cambridgema.gov/~TheWorks).

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